LITTLEST STREET HAS THE GREATEST NAME

Just Long Enough for a Dueling Ground Is United States Street, Tucked Up Against the Frowning Wall of the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The Cops Don't Know Where It Is, but the Children Do, and Their Play Songs Ring There Day and Night

By ARTHUR CHAPMAN

One of the windows of United States Street, overlooking the Navy Yard and the River of Bridges

PHOTOS BY KAPLAN

Play is United States Street's chief industry

Friendly stairways and a tree help to make United States Street different

The only traffic jam on United States Street is when this horse and wagon go in or out of the stable yard

DIRECTING persons to United States Street is a matter that has humbled the pride of more than one crossing officer in greater New York.

Not that many individuals inquire for United States Street, but when they do they are quite likely to have their troubles in getting directions. At that United States Street has plenty of antiquity behind it. It is no mushroom growth, springing out of the times of war, when almost everything that was named, from a baby to a catboat, had to have a patriotic name. But because it can boast only a scant 125 feet in total length, and because it has neither stores nor factories, but only a quaint atmosphere of hominess to draw attention to it, United States Street, for all its antiquity, does not live in the sub-consciousness of the crossing policeman.

The writer of this article had no definite idea of the location of United States Street when he advanced his query to the crossing officer at Canal Street, at the end of the Manhattan Bridge. He had been told that the street was somewhere near that bridge, and it seemed the logical thing to ask the nearest police official.

As it was, for the fraction of a second the questioner was suspected of an attempt to "put something over." Then the officer came to the conclusion that the question was legitimate.

"You've got me stuck," he admitted handsomely. "If there is such a street I don't know where it is. It may be some little street over on the Brooklyn side. It's a cinch it ain't on this side of the bridge."

The questioner was turning away when the officer added:

"Here comes a man who knows every street in greater New York. You ask him about it and he'll set you right."

The highly recommended individual was another officer, walking slowly back from the bridge. He measured fully up to the adzzling advance notice given out by his press agent at the crossing.

"It's a little street right bang up against the navy yard," he answered promptly when the name of United States Street was brought up. "Take the bridge car and get off on the Brooklyn side, and then walk down toward the river alongside the navy yard and you'll find it."

But even with such explicit directions United States Street is not to be found without a little more inquiry. It is such a modest violet of a street, and the mossy stones about it are so big!

A neighborhood butcher supplied the last needed element of information. Butchers always seem to be the best advisers in neighborhood matters, anyway. Apparently they keep better personal track of their customers than grocers. Of course, the bartenders used to be pretty good that way, but they are staffs no more to be leaned on. Perhaps a good many of them have gone into the butcher business. Anyway, it was friendly and explicit advice that came from the butcher shop, and that unwrapped the last vestige of mystery from United States Street.

Little Street, the highway from which United States Street branches, is shunted to the left by the big, arrogant wall of the navy yard, which is laid out on a bias, and consequently cuts off one street after another in this neighborhood. Just before the navy yard wall forces Little Street into its left oblique one comes upon the sign "United States Street," on the side of a wooden house on a corner.

Here is a physical description of the properties grouped on the United States Street stage:

A scant fifty paces of sidewalk, curb and paving. (The thought occurs that United States Street would have been a delectable dueling ground in early days, when Americans were given to locating such places. There is just about room in the little, hidden street for principals and seconds.)

One wooden house, bearing the sign, on the left-hand side of the street. This house is comparatively modern—so much so that it has no real place in the scheme.

Two walls of brick. One of these extends on the left-hand side of the street to the navy yard wall, above which can be seen the giant framework of the traveling cranes used in battleship construction.

One grass plot, three feet wide, extending the entire length of the street on the walled side.

One lamppost, on the wall side—a new product. (United States Street seems to belong naturally in the age of kerosene lamps and of lamplighters who ran up and down ladders.)

Four houses opposite the brick wall. Between the corner house and the group huddled against the navy yard wall is a courtyard where a neighborhood storekeeper stables his horse and keeps his wagon. In the West this would be called a corral, and there would be saddles scattered about and the horses would have to be fought into the harness.

Two brick houses, the first one three stories in height, with basement. The other is two stories, with basement. They are old houses, with outside stairways of wood leading to the first floors---comfortable looking stairways which look as if they were built for family conclaves.

One two-story wooden house, dwarfed by the brick houses on one side and the wall of the navy yard on the other. It is an old house and shelters one of United States Street's first residents.

One tree—the pride of United States Street. It is a tree that casts a shadow big enough to shade the windows in the basement of the first of the brick houses. It fills the angle between the house wall and the stairway. A tendency to lean toward the street—perhaps to get a better view of the childish games that are generally going on there—has been corrected by a loop attached to the house. In time of drought the tree gets plenty of water and it shows the good care it has received. In return it lightens United States Street with a gratifying touch of color, and its leaves are constantly stirring in the little breezes that find their way over the brick wall even on the warmest days.

So much for the material elements of United States Street.

The human elements of this "smallest street with the biggest name," as the residents laughingly call it, are mostly at the hop scotch and skipping rope age. The families that live in the brick houses are not childless—not by any means. Most of them moved to United States Street because of the nice grass plot across the way, where the children can find their own little shady park in the morning and because of the trees and the stairways on the other side, not to speak of the big courtyard in the rear of the tenement houses, where there is plenty of room. Also they have chosen United States Street because there is no automobile traffic there. When one's child goes out in the street to play it is a relief to know that the horse and wagon—which outfit is driven back and forth daily from the stable yard—comprise the extreme limit of traffic.

Lured by such matters of safety and noninterruption of games, the children of the neighborhood drift to United States Street for their play. The pavement is scrawled with hop scotch insignia. Then, again, there may be games of hide and seek, with the lamp post as the base. And most always one hears the regular thud of sandaled feet on the pavement and childish voices repeat the chants of the rope jumpers.

Some of the street songs run into long arithmetical formulas, going forward and back. The long ones are chanted when some particularly agile rope skipper defies all efforts to make her nimble feet commit a fault—for the dancing fairies of United States Street are nearly all girls, as they are everywhere else. Boys, apparently, do not skip the rope until they become pugilists and have to take up the exercise as part of their training. And nobody has ever heard a pugilist chant such pleasing songs as those sung when there is a rope skipping bee in United States Street.

Some of these songs of United States Street, sung to the rhythm of the whirling rope, are as follows:

I

Little boys, little girls,
Red, white and blue;
Stars over you.

II

I love coffee,
I love tea.
I love the boys
And the boys love me.

III

Old man Daisy
Drives me crazy;
Up and down the ladder,
One, one, one.

IV

Mary Ann, Mary Ann, ha, ha, ha!
Kissed the fellows on a Broadway car;
I'll tell Pa,
You tell Ma;
Mary Ann, Mary Ann, ha, ha, ha!

V

Water, water,
Flowers growing,
Up so high;
And we are sure to die, die, die;
We are sure to die for shame;
Turn your back and tell your fellow's name.

VI

Cinderella,
Dressed in yellow.

VII

Pepper, salt, mustard, cider;
(Here the singers chant to one hundred by tens.)
Slow poke,
Hope you choke.

VIII

Mamma, mamma, I am sick;
Send for the doctor, quick, quick, quick;
Doctor, doctor, must I die?
Yes, my darling, by and bye.

The grown-ups of United States Street are mostly Russians. The men are all dock workers, who find it cheaper and better to live in this quiet quarter, so near to their work, instead of living far off in some congested part of the city where there are no trees and no grass plots and where the children have no such glorious chance to play.

"Come up to our rooms on the third floor," said one of the men, a big, quiet-spoken Russian, with a smile only a whit less friendly than that of his wife and little girl. "Perhaps you can see something to interest you there. We find it nice looking out of those windows."

In fact, over on the other river, across Manhattan, people are paying big rentals for windows that look out on views not more inspiring. A corner of the navy yard fills the foreground, and beyond is the River of Bridges, with its bulking boroughs that turn into jewels at night. During the war these windows must have been thrilling points of vantage, with all the mystery that was thrown about the navy yard, and all the searchlights that swung back and forth along the river, from behind the big walls against which United States Street has always nestled.

Not all the interest and significance of the view are to be found outside the windows that front on United States Street. Inside this combination kitchen and living room one finds a little story of Americans in the making. It is a neat room, with oilcloth on the floor. An oil stove furnishes the means of cooking. There are clean crockery and clean silverware in evidence and there are pictures on the walls. One of the pictures is of the husband and father, showing him in the uniform of a United States soldier. He served in the army, he says, though he did not get across. Also there is a picture of him in a Russian uniform.

It was eight years since he had come to this country. Eight years—and part of that brief time willingly given to his adopted country! Eight years, and work at good wages on the docks, a comfortable home for the family and a good school nearby and a nice place in which the little girl could play.

Surely, with such exhibits in its favor United States Street is living up to its name.

A DOG'S LIFE ALONG THE DRIVE

By Lois Upshaw

THE little boy who boasted that he had been barked at by the King's dog would revel in a stroll up Riverside Drive at the walking hour. Though the animals have no crowned monarchs for masters, there are surely those with just as regal a bearing. In variety of species, grooming, behavior and attendants, the procession is everlasting. Along this breeze-swept boulevard overlooking the changeable waters of the Hudson there is an interesting parade of doggish personalities every day.

At early dawn two bloodhounds start the promenade at about 115th Street. Their big, awkward bodies are spotted and their enormous, pendulous ears flop disconsolately. A negro boy escorts them in chains, and they pad silently down the bridle path, a grave, dejected trio. After breakfast more dogs appear, after luncheon still more, and by 4 or 5 o'clock every dog in the neighborhood is having its day—big and little, curly haired and close shaven, rotund and svelte, stern and frolicsome, decorated and "au naturel." You never know what is going to bark at you next. Some of them walk with proud and haughty step, fully conscious that they are on parade. Others make it a picnic and play around the benches and jump up on the stone wall.

On good days a fine Russian wolfhound likes to post himself in the observation point near Grant's Tomb and gaze raptly up the river. Somebody has remarked that Russian wolfhounds belong with tall, queenly women with mysterious eyes and earrings. It does sound reasonable, but it does not always work out that way. This dog is accompanied by a plump lady with gray hair and eyes of dancing brown, who whistles softly to herself.

Time and again it happens that way. The dog and his master or mistress fail to match. A girl approaches with a brisk, athletic step, dressed in severely plain attire, wearing heavily rimmed spectacles, and from her briefcase, as she settles herself upon the bench to read, she extracts Kant's Critique of Reason. She holds with one hand a slender leather leash, at the end of which fluffs a little Skye terrier, powdery white and much beribboned. A heavy gentleman with a mutton chop beard and a briar pipe trudges along in the wake of a sleek little Pekingese that wears a slip-on, sleeveless sweater of delicate zephyrs. It is a strenuous outing for the German nurse-maid who is manipulating the baby carriage with one hand and leading a restive Newfoundland with the other. The big dog shakes his head impatiently as if to be free from his collar and the silly strap, and in his eyes there is a long wistfulness. Perhaps he is dreaming of small boy playmates that some fortunate dogs have—of being hitched to red wagons, and having a kennel in the side yard of a real home, far from crowded Manhattan.

Occasionally the dog and his bodyguard run true to form. There is the young woman in sports clothes, with glowing cheeks and buoyant walk, skilfully managing a great tawny collie. Stormy days seem to hold an added zest for this pair and they joyously tack in the wind after the fashion of a sailboat. An opera tenor, taking in deep breaths, carries a leash over one arm and lets his dog run free beside him. It is a handsome Irish setter with a red silken coat that glows in the sun like burnished copper, and his master taps him with his cane, to the setter's huge delight, first on a foreleg, then lightly in the ruff, and a sly poke amid the ribs. It is some sort of charming game nobody else understands.

Two schoolboys are out for a frolic with a beloved Airedale named Sam, and they also slip the leash and the spirited Samuel plays a fast game with them on the grassy slope down in the park. He retrieves the sticks they throw and races madly with them until his tongue hangs out. His glistening, beady eyes hold an amused disdain for the other dogs passing calmly and decorously by. Sam considers them hopeless sissies. He stiffens his sturdy body as he catches a look from a curly puppy dressed in an orchid neck ribbon, mincing by with an old lady. Was that a glint of condescension in the sissy's eye, betokening a feeling of class superiority in fastidious conventionality? Sam gives a contemptuous sniff and fairly exudes pride at every bristle. Can it be that the poor littie wisp does not know that a noble Airedale is now the White House dog?

An elderly gentleman of portly build who wears a monocle and high hat talks in French to his smartly groomed Boston terrier.

A blonde débutante, lovely from her fascinating veil to her satin pumps, has in tow a tiny puffball of a Pomeranian, the smallest dog of them all. He has to make his little legs go like lightning to keep up with his mistress, to whom he is tethered with a graceful thong, so that he cannot always be steady in his direction and usually runs in decided curves. A capful of wind would blow him over the wall.

Now and then there is a touch of restlessness and loneliness, and the note of visible tragedy is sometimes struck. The saddest sight on the Drive is an English bull that wears a limp satin neck bow of pale pink. He jingles as he waddles along in a complicated set of silver-bradded harness. A corpulent lady takes him for the daily walk. Her black clothes are of queer design and combination and she fairly billows when she walks, owing to what must be at least nine petticoats. She calls him Baby, and talks to him constantly, scolding and nagging and asking him tiresome rhetorical questions. He was once a genuinely fine bulldog, you can see that, and given half a chance, he would now be a powerful animal of intrepid courage and dauntless step. But his birthright has been stolen. He has been nursed and coddled until he has the stamina of a jellyfish. His ancestors could hang on to a fighting bull, but Baby can hardly make the steep grade at 116th Street. The spattered pink bow has slid over one eye, and the other one looks wearily abashed as he plods up the hill to the droning commands of his mistress, a brave spirit crushed under a soiled loop of pale satin ribbon!